

that's what they do by orphan_account

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Summary:

If Max had to be honest, she never thought that of all people, Will Byers would end up being her best friend.

that's what they do

Author's Note:

This is kind of a continuation to my other one-shot "she" so idk read it if you want more context.

Also thank you for all the comments and kudos on that one. I legit started crying

If Max had to be honest, she never thought that of all people, Will Byers would end up being her best friend.

It's not that she didn't like him or something like that, it was just that they were very different. And he had only allowed her to hang out with the Party because of Lucas and Dustin.

So now sitting in Will's bed, said boy in her arms, sobbing into her chest after telling her something that he probably never even told himself, Max thinks about how they became so close, the little things they did for each other on the way of getting where they are now.

1984.

Max had never been big on making friends, specially not boys who looked like they could get beaten up for just entering a room, but that was something that attracted her to them too.

They were damn strong, even when the whole school had their eyes on them (on Will, Max though, mostly on Will.) they did not care.

And yeah, maybe now wasn't the best time to talk to them, but she couldn't help but feel happy that at least someone wanted her there.

She rejected them, making herself look tough. Yeah, she didn't want to be alone, she'll be an easy target, but it was better than hanging out with the nerds from av club.

Or at least that's what she said to herself while she walked away from her locker, Dustin and Lucas' faces painted with a frown and a sad expression.

She saw Will walk out of school that day, he looked sad- almost numb, and Max didn't know what exactly was the story behind all those "zombie boy", the pity looks thrown his way, and people avoiding him as if he was some sort of walking disease, but she had a feeling that he was strong too, maybe more than people would ever know.

Later that week she didn't see Will again, nor Lucas or Dustin tried to approach her after telling her about the Halloween thing.

It made her kind of sad, but it didn't matter, it's not like they were her friends anyway.

(she was more worried about the look on Will's face than her non-existent friends, and that's something Max didn't do, she didn't worry about people).

She wasn't looking for them, she really wasn't, she just happened to see Will, a camera maybe a little to big on his hands, a smile (forced,

she thought, it looks forced, like all the times she had to pretend at the dinner table with Billy at her side and her mother in front of her).

They were all wearing matching costumes, and Max snickered. *Nerds*, she thought rolling her eyes and following them the next blocks, hiding behind the bushes on the sidewalk.

She observed them for a moment, Lucas and Dustin going on about something she couldn't hear, Will and Mike, walking side to side, silent.

The thought of being part of their group of friends made Max smile, picturing herself among them, actually sharing her interests with someone and not being worried they would judge her for not using dresses or tying her hair with a ribbon, or whatever girls actually liked to do.

She put her mask on, shifted the plastic knife in her hand and jumped out of the bushes, scaring them.

They all flinched and jumped back, screaming.

(Will did not scream or flinch, she noticed, his body freezing and eyes going blank- losing all its brightness. Her breath hitched for a second, feeling guilty and regretting what she did)

She took off her mask, laughter taking over her

“Holy shit!” Will’s eyes returned to normal while she laughed, a shy smile tugging at the corner of his lips “you should have seen the look on your faces!” she clutched the mask on her hand, the image of the look on Will’s face the day he left early for school and when she scared them melting together on her mind, making her heart ache with regret.

“And you? Who screams like that?” she ignored it “You sound like a little girl” a smile still plastered on her face

She started walking away, thinking that was it- that’s all she wanted to do

“Hey, you guys coming or not?” why was she doing this anyways? “I heard we should hit up Loch Nora” Will looked uncertain, shifting his weight from feet to feet

“That’s where the rich people are, right?” she heard Lucas and Dustin cheer behind her and run towards her

Will wasn’t there.

And Mike seemed freaked out, she didn’t understand why but a part of her wanted to freak out too, even if she had no reason to think something happened.

Mike turned around and went back running, calling for Will. They

followed suit, worried expression on each of the boys' faces, and if Max could see herself, she'd probably have a confused one mixed with worry.

Max didn't have time to register what was happening, when she got there Mike was already getting Will up from the ground where he was curled up, protective arms around him.

Will looked lost, almost dazed. His eyes darting over to Mike and then the street, confused and maybe scared.

"What's wrong with him?" she asked just as Will and Mike had gone far enough to not hear her.

No one answered, they just looked at her and then shook their heads, like getting her question out of their heads as if they never heard her.

After that, when everything truly started to get out of control, after Lucas told her everything that happened last year, Max wanted nothing but to cry when she saw Will again.

She didn't know him, they hadn't talked that much at all, but there was something in Will's tired eyes and rare genuine smiles that made Max feel oddly comforted by his presence. He was stronger than anyone Max had ever known, she had a new found respect for him that she never had for anyone.

He could be dead by now was all that Max could think about *He could be dead by now and you're being petty for smiling at your boyfriend*. She wanted to shout, to tell that 'Eleven' girl that Will could be dead by now and she was acting like they were five years old and Max had broken her favorite toy

She stayed quiet instead, going along with the plan.

Everything happened in a blur and Max was in the Byers house again, clothes full of something gross and gooey, still trying to catch her breath from everything that happened.

This would hunt her down, in nightmares and memories, but she saved her friend...s, right? That was all that mattered.

"He's alive- he's alright" she heard Steve said, a sigh of relief leaving his lips. He hung up the phone and stared at his hands, then at the kitchen where the fight with Billy had happened. Max winced, he's gonna have to pay for the broken plates.

Mike sniffed beside her, she looked at him, his body was shaking but there was a smile on his flushed face.

and tears of her own started to form in Max's eyes

He's alive.

The Snowball was the lamest thing Max had ever attended, but it was kind of nice, sitting at a table with all her friends, none whom were in mortal danger.

Yeah, it was nice.

When Will arrived Max felt something lift from her chest, there was a smile on his face- a genuine smile, those that were very rare these days, those that had always been rare since Max met him.

Lucas asked her to dance and her attention was taken out of Will. She smiled at him and rose up an eyebrow.

Everything was better now, it *felt* better.

So Max danced, smiled, and dug up the courage to lean in and kiss Lucas, ignoring everyone and everything surrounding them (ignoring Will sitting at the table, looking everywhere but Mike and El, fidgeting with his hands and biting his lips).

Later, when everyone was just talking and moving off beat to the music, she sat next to Will, a question in her tongue that could be disguised as something she couldn't ask the last time she saw him instead of being about something that maybe Will did not dare to face, yet

“Are you okay?” her voice had gone soft, and he looked at her, surprise evident in his eyes

He doubted, opening and closing his mouth, maybe thinking if he'd really tell her how he feels

“Y-yes...” it was a lie. A lie like all the other times he had answered that question, and Max wondered how long it would go on.

She nodded, and stuck by his side the rest of the night.

1985.

“I’m sorry” a smile tugged at the corners of Max’s lips after the words left Mike’s mouth

“I’m sorry too...” Jane said in a soft voice, sounding a little stubborn and not sorry at all. But that was enough for Max. She was worth an apology

She sighed, the hot summer wind blowing strands of her hair in front of her face

“Apology accepted” the notebook on her legs is probably sticking at them with sweat, smearing some of the words written with pen, she picks it up and puts it in the ground “no hard feelings” Jane smiles,

turning around and walking out of Castle Byers, followed by Mike

Will chuckled, shaking his head, he looked at her, a gentle smile that nowadays he only gives her, pencil in hand and sketchpad on his lap
“Well, now things will be easier” he says, going back to his drawing.

Max stares at him, hands twitching with the urge to brush the strands of too long hair falling in front of his face.

She leans in, looking at what Will is drawing.

A sketch of Mike smiling, his freckles forming the constellations Will loves so much.

(Max learned that months ago, when Will invited her to a sleepover and she saw the used and old astronomy books sitting in Will’s desk.

“I didn’t know you liked this stuff” she opens a book that has a lot of papers sticking out- sketches of the constellations, tracing over and sometimes making new paths “it’s cool”

Will stayed silent while he looked for his sleeping bag at the bottom of his closet

“It reminds me of someone” he says finally, taking the sleeping bag and rolling out on the floor.)

She watches him draw for a while, and then goes back to her notebook, twirling a pen in her fingers

“Will they, though?” she hears Will’s breath hitch and tries not to think too much about it.

Max’s wall is plastered with drawings that Will made.

She didn’t mean it to get so big, it were just two or three drawings at first, that Will gave her

(“That’s so cool!”

“really? I don’t like it that much- you can have it”)

With time it had grown, and now they covered most of the wall behind her bed and the door of her closet.

It was a nice touch, some of them had sparkling colors from the metallic paint Hopper bought Will for his 14th birthday, and some were just pencil sketches, sometimes they were so light you could barely see them if you weren’t close enough.

Will always seemed surprised that she still had them whenever he entered her room, as if he was expecting her to take them down the moment he was out of the door.

Max didn’t know who made Will feel like his art wasn’t worth showing off, but she was gonna kick their ass if she ever found out who it was (she had a slight suspicion it was that absent father Will never liked to talk about.)

There are little things they never talk about, like how sometimes Will would excuse himself at lunch when Mike is talking a tad too much about Jane. And Max would wait him outside of wherever he had run off to.

She never mentioned or questioned why his eyes were puffy and red from crying.

She knew why.

They never talked about how sometimes Will (sometimes her) would wake up in the middle of the night at a sleepover, sweat drenching his back and tears staining his eyes, he would shake her gently, waking her up and asking her if they can go outside.

Max doesn't understand why he chooses her, why her when he has Mike right beside him and sometimes Jane- his step-sister who went through almost the same as him, but no, he chooses Max to be shoulder he can cry on when the nightmares are too much and he can't breath on his own anymore.

She feels special, like she is worth something now.

They never talk about that time Max stole her step-dad's expensive alcohol at 3am and skated over to Will's house, where he opened his window with a frown on his face and a look of disapproval.

They don't talk about how she was the only one who got drunk and cried about not being normal.

And that's the thing Max thinks makes their friendship so strong. They just know when not to talk.

1986.

"It's been almost a year and I'm still weirded out with the fact that she is my step-sister," Will says while mixing the cake batter for Jane's birthday "It's just-" he keeps mixing, gripping the spoon to tightly "It's just weird, you know? I barely knew who she was, the only thing I knew it was that she saved me- and then,"

He pauses, looking up at the ceiling "and then she's my best friend's girlfriend, my mom's boyfriend's daughter, who then becomes my step-dad and now she is my step-sister," Max looks at him from the magazine she'd been reading, her arms on table and head resting in her hands "it's too much at once. And it's not like I'm not glad that I have a family but-"

he stopped mixing, looking down at the cake batter and sighing deeply, he looked at Max, a hopeless sad look on his eyes

"I don't know how to feel. Why her?" she stood up and walked over to him, taking the bowl and spoon out of his grip and starting to mix it herself. She shrugged and looked at the floor

“It’s the family that you get, and maybe the one you deserve” Will kept looking at her, lips drawn in a thin line and brows furrowed, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides

“Yeah,” he said after a while, going over to turn the oven on while Max poured the cake batter into the mold “maybe you’re right”

And if Will excused himself early from the party, Max didn’t say anything.

There were times where Will wouldn’t talk to anyone for a day, or for days. Isolating himself from the outside world, hiding.

and Max was okay with that, as long as she wasn’t included on Will’s list of ‘people to avoid’ during those times. Generally, she wasn’t but sometimes not even her could get past his bedroom door without being kicked out of the house by a pissed Jane who just wants his brother to get better.

This was one of those times.

She entered through the unlocked window, stumbling her way inside and trying not to fall

“That’s very unsafe, I could’ve been a murderer” Will shrugs under the covers of his bed, his curled up body all tangled in the blankets, making the bed a mess

“I don’t care, It’ll be better if you killed me” his voice is muffled by the pillow, and his hair is sticking in every direction.

Max sighed and sat on the bed, putting her hand in his arms, gently tracing little circles with her thumb in a form of comfort.

She hated when he was like this, because it was something beyond his trauma and PTSD, it was something Max couldn’t really help with, not when he wouldn’t even admit it to himself

“I hate them,” Will sobbed and curled up more on himself “I feel so selfish and wrong, but I don’t want them to be together anymore”

She knew who he was talking about, of course she knew. That boy was engraved on Will’s sketchpad with pencil, pen, watercolors and any other material you could think of, decorating almost every page of it. And that girl was in his life everyday, confiding her life on him, talking to him any time she could.

But he would never admit it out loud, and Max wouldn’t either, because that’s what they do.